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ABSTRACT

Low cost or no cost ideas for programs in smaller rural schools are listed. Areas covered include public relations, special programs and curriculum. Based on the experience of a small school district in Elizabeth, Illinois, these ideas include the school's relationship to students, faculty and the community; extracurricular activities relating to substance abuse, academic competition, and personal adjustment; and development of innovative approaches in math, physical education, social studies, music and vocational education. The effectiveness of boards of education, teachers, parents, administrators, taxpayers, and students can be enhanced if they see themselves engaged in an activity on which they are all on the same side, attempting to accomplish the same goals. (SKW)

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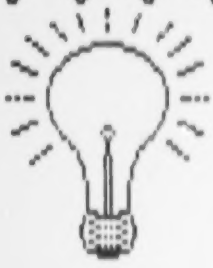

SMALL RURAL SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

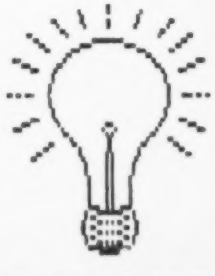
The attached summary of ideas and programs were developed by those of us involved with education at the River Ridge Community Unit School District serving Elizabeth and Hanover, Illinois, in JoDaviess County.

This collection of ideas has been prepared to share with you some of the things we are doing on a low or no cost basis. Most ideas are not unique to our district, and the list is certainly not inclusive of all the programs or ideas we think are worthy of sharing.

We hope that you might find something of interest or help in this collection, and that maybe at sometime we might benefit from one of your suggestions as well.

River Ridge is a rural school district with 600 students K-12. We serve two communities with school buildings in each. Our middle school students attend school in Hanover and our high school students attend school in Elizabeth. Each building also serves a K-5 population.

We welcome and invite your comments or questions. Please feel free to contact Supt. James Burgett, River Ridge C.U.D. #210, Box 489, Elizabeth, IL 61028 at anytime.



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PUBLIC RELATIONS

THE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER- Positive communication is the key to public support. We produce a district newsletter that is mailed to every resident in our district, not just to the families of students. We also put "out-of-towners" on the mailing list if they have shown interest in our system. For instance we have a former superintendent, a retired Army general who graduated 52 years ago, a business secretary that likes to follow our school's progress, newspaper writers that have done stories on our school, the Regional Supt., directors of our cooperatives, and the names of parents who do not live with their children on our mailing list, to name a few. We continually invite new readers to be added to our mailing list. It only costs a few cents to mail our newsletter and it is money well invested.

Our newsletter always includes a district calender of events, usually a central theme (such as THE SCHOOL REPORT CARD, registration, winter sports, parenting suggestions, etc.), articles about awards and honors, special projects or programs in certain subject areas or grade levels, often an editorial from the supt., and usually an "ad" about an upcoming school event. Staff members are encouraged to submit ideas and information. The newsletter is written and produced on our office computer, using the PRINTSHOP and lots of IASB clip art. We duplicate it on "HAROLD"* and our HS business classes do the folding and stapling. We distribute about 1,850 copies with each issue.

The cost per issue for postage and supplies is about $110. The public relations generated is priceless.

*HAROLD is one of our machines. He is a Xerox 2400. We also have HENRIETTA, another Xerox 2400, and RITA (THE REDUCER) our Xerox 1012. We found that personalizing the machines was a positive attitude idea. It adds a little fun and creativity to things when everyone from little kids to community leaders refer to your copier as HAROLD. I also remember the chuckle we had when we called the 800 number to report on a malfunction. We told the lady who answered to tell our technician that "Harold was experiencing some indigestion and sounded a bit raspy." After a mild protest she took the message. The serviceman arrived later to fix the copier...but he arrived with a story and a smile!

THE MESSAGE BOARD- Each of our schools has a large message board placed outside the buildings where as many people as possible can read the message each day. Each message board was purchased through community fund raisers. We consider this our most important public relations tool. We make an effort to change the message 3-4 times each week, and daily as often as we can. The administration writes the messages and the upper grade and high school special education classes take responsibility for the actual work in changing the signs. The teachers make this a class project that requires maintaining an inventory of the letters, counting, spelling, centering, and some simple elbow grease. The teachers also take responsibility for proofreading the messages daily.

We had one of our more talented high school students write a computer program that allows the administration to merely type the message on the computer. The program then determines if the inventory has enough letters and finally prints the message out on the screen (and on paper) as it would fit, word for word, on the five lines of the message board. This save a tremendous amount of time and frustration.

A policy prohibits personal messages such as birthday greetings, garage sale announcments, etc., and limits use of the sign board to school functions and community service announcments. A one-week advance notice is required, and messages are approved according to an established priorty.

We use the message board to announce school events or fund raisers, and then follow up with a thank you to those that participated. We use it to express good luck to students competing in certOain activities, or to welcome visiting teams. A recent message wished good luck to a neighboring school who was advancing in the IHSA state football tournament.

New and fresh messages, some routine, some creative, keep everyone looking. I recently heard a comment from a man who passes by our high school daily on his way to work, but doesn't live or workin with 25 miles of our district. He said, "I never pass by without looking at your sign...in some ways I know more about your community than I do about my own!"

Since the students, banks, and one industry contributed toward the purchase of both message boards, there was no cost to providing this service. Even the upkeep of the message board is financed through the student activity fund.

THE BOARD REPORT- Nothing undermines more quickly than rumor. The faster you can share information with the public the better, and the ones who should know first are the employees. For this reason we release a "BOARD OF EDUCATION REPORT" to all employees the morning after each board meeting. In fact, the report itself is written the night of the meeting, copied, and distributed to our other building and to the mailboxes in the high school before employees arrive for work. In essence, they are the "first to know" what happened at the board meeting, and they become the primary outlet of accurate information.

This process does more than just help to share the news of the meeting, it makes the employees feel that they are a part of the process...and it helps build a sense of trust.

Cost is less than $25/year for this service.

WELCOME AND THANK YOU- We strongly encourage our staff and administration to send lots of notes and letters and to make phone calls whenever a "welcome" or a "thank you" is appropriate. We also encourage "Good News Notes" and stock "Good News" notepads and district thank you cards. We have our local area vocational center print these for only the cost of the materials.

When a new family enrolls, when someone earns a special honor, after a suggestion is offered, or someone helps a school bus in distress....or for whatever reason, we quickly send a letter, a note, or make a phone call. Quite often we follow up on thank you messages by including them in our newsletter as well.

Nothing promotes a more positive attitude from families and community members than receiving a "Good News" letter from the school!

The cost is basically for postage since supply costs are minimal.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

The following list of programs reflect an attitude of caring and a willingness to put forth that "little extra" by our staff members.

SAFEKIDS is a program that is financed by C.R.U.S.A.D. (Citizens Resolved & United in Support of Adolescent Development), our local community action group. It is a program that meets one night per week for nine weeks and involves 3rd and 4th graders. It deals with the skills and

knowledge that kids need when they are home alone, babysitting, or in certain situations of potential danger.

There is no cost to the school since all expenses are met by a grant obtained by CRUSAD.

HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU TWO is a program for students in grades K-4. At some levels it is integrated into the regular subject matter, and at other levels it is handled as a separate subject. Instructional kits with materials, manuals, and programs were purchased through a State Drug/Alcohol Program grant. The teachers were then trained the following year through a second grant. Now the program is operational for all K-4 students.

The goals of this program are to gather and evaluate a body of knowledge on drugs, to develop skills for making responsible decisions, and to strengthen the concept that each student is a unique and special person who is continually growing and changing, and who is capable of directing that growth. Hopefully the learner will develop skills for coping responsibly with stressful situations.

The cost to the district for this program was funded through the grants received. The cost of continued operation is contained within the district's normal instructional budget.

SADD is a high school organization known as "STUDENTS AGAINST DRIVING DRUNK." Our school chapter of this national organization is a very active group that involves a great many students. Three committees are quite productive in the SADD organization. The Activities Committee plans a school sponsored activity each month. Dances, roller skating, swimming, pizza/movie nights are examples of the well attended SADD sponsored activities.

The Awareness Committee is responsible for the dissemination of information and the sharing of SADD related facts to the student body. Working with the school newspaper, school newsletter, CRUSAD organization, classroom teachers, and other outlets, information is always on the front burner.

The Prevention Committee is charged with the task of presenting programs that relate directly with the high school students.

Our SADD Chapter also has 12 students who participate in the CLOWNING Program. CLOWNING stands for Children Learning Other Ways Naturally. The students have received professional training in make-up and dress, and present their message to K-4 students through skits that compliment the "HERES LOOKING AT YOU TWO" program mentioned above. The skits deal with control of feelings, appropriate behavior,

and ideas that generally relate self-awareness and positive attitude skills.

In addition to the "normal" activities of SADD, each meeting has some time set aside for the development of PEER FACILITATOR skills and for the establishment of SUPPORT GROUPS.

SADD is self-supporting. The district pays the supervisor a stipend. The supervisor is also the high school guidance counselor. The CLOWNING training and supplies were paid for by two consecutive grants.

INTRAMURAL ACADEMIC BOWL is an exceptional program started last year at the high school level. Although the middle school and high school both have academic bowl teams that compete with other schools, this novel "intramural" approach has really taken off with the high school students. Currently there are 16 intramural teams of five students each (representing 47% of the entire high school student body). The teams compete either before school or after school in tournament play. At the end of each nine week grading period there is a semi-final and championship match open to the public.

The senior class of 1987 presented the school with an academic bowl scoreboard, and the district already pays the coach a stipend for his interscholastic team, so essentially this intramural program is cost-free.

LTS is a class offered to sophomores. LTS stands for LOVE, TRUST AND SUCCESS. It is a one-semester class offered opposite driver's education. (A sophomore will take driver's ed. one semester and the next semester he/she has the option of taking LTS during what would otherwise be a one semester study hall.) LTS meets three times each week.

LTS is a discussion class where students talk about values, attitudes and decision making. Sexual behavior, AIDS, love vs infatuation, goal-setting, family responsibility, personal worth and attitude control are some of the topics discussed. Video tapes, lecture, discussion and group activities are incorporated into this homework-free experience. This popular class earns the student a half credit. The class is not required and the credit does not fulfill any specific requirement toward graduation.

The class is taught by the superintendent and gives him an opportunity to get to know the students on a personal level...thus closing the gap that might exist between the administration and the students.

There is literally no cost to this program since the cost of instruction is not at extra item for the budget.

T/A SYSTEM is a very successful program that provides a "TEACHER/ADVISOR" for every student in the middle school (grades 6-8).

Every teacher that instructs a middle school student (and is available and willing) is a "TEACHER/ADVISOR." The students are then selected through a draft system similar to the NFL draft, and end up in one of many T/A groups, each with about 15 students. The T/A Advisor, as they are called, remains with the same student throughout his/her middle school career. Each T/A group has a mixture of 6th, 7th and 8th graders.

The T/A groups meet a minimum of once a week. Every other meeting time involves group discussions or activities relating to improvement of the self-image, getting along with others, decision making, or other such skill development. The alternate session is centered around an event or game that may or may not involve other T/A groups.

The T/A Advisor may work with his/her students at conference times, when staffings are conducted, or with other meetings. The T/A Advisor often gives support and guidance to students with achievement difficulties and provides congratulations to students doing well.

Advisors have received training in the system and work closely with each other in planning and evaluating the system. The building principal and guidance counselor each have a T/A group along with most of the teaching staff.

The training sessions were supported through a State of Illinois Inservice Grant. The expenses involved in this program are practically non-existant.

LINK is the name of a similar program in the High School. Every high school student is assigned a "LINK". (Believe it or not, LINK is NOT an acronym! Link means link!) The principal, guidance counselor, and superintendent, as well as most of the teachers, serve as LINKS to about 9 students each. The students assigned are from each grade level, 9-12.

Unlike the T/A System, the LINK system does not meet in small groups, but the LINKS work on a one-to-one basis with their students.

LINKS are assigned no specific duties. They are as effective or ineffective as they elect to be, but the

students compare notes on what the other LINKS do and thus most LINKS are actively involved.

Like most high schools, ours prints a D/F (and Good News) report each week. The name of the student, the course, and the grade (D or F) is distributed to all teachers weekly. Also, the name of the student's LINK is on the list. LINKS then contact the student for support, advice, or to hear concerns. Teachers also contact other LINKS to see what they might suggest.

The honor roll is another time when the LINK has an opportunity to communicate with the student on a positive note. I send letters home with each of my LINKS every time they make the honor roll. I also try to meet with each link at least once each grading period, and usually more often. I send them birthday cards and follow their efforts in cocurricular activities as well...using any opportunity to offer them the praise they have earned.

LINK is a successful program. Potential suicides have been averted, parents have made contacts through LINKS that might not have been made otherwise, and a lot of positive communication has resulted. LINK works because it actually provides each student with a "link" to the system. The link intentionally does not act in the traditional "teacher" role, but serves more as an advocate and as someone who truly cares about the individual's total situation.

JTPA TUTORING is the name of a special program offered to high school students who qualify as JTPA clients. Through a special JTPA grant we are able to combine the services of a Chapter I aide (a certified instructor) and offer individual and small group tutoring to many high school students at little cost to the district. This very exceptional program gives us the flexibility to meet the needs of some "borderline" students that might not otherwise qualify for special education or related services.

One teacher recently commented that the program "is having terrific impact, especially in helping students become more self-directed in developing good study skills."

The instructor is employed full time and is funded completely by JTPA and Chapter I grants.

GIFTED is an area that many schools poke around at but few really get involved due to the general lack of money. We have an outstanding math and language arts program in grades 1-8. In the high school grades we have an operating gifted math program resulting in a "fifth year" advanced placement class.

Approximately 5% of our students participate in the 1-8 gifted program. These same students receive a minimum of 30 minutes of daily instruction. The success of the program is due to the dedication of the elementary principal and of the 6 teachers who are certified in gifted education.

Certification classes, payment for writing plans and/or lessons, and most gifted supplies are funded solely by our gifted program grant.

CURRICULUM IDEAS

(This is only a sample of ideas submitted)

Most of the following ideas are within the budget of the regular instructional program, so no additional costs are involved.

MATH- The math teachers are very pleased that Algebra I is an option for 8th graders and that these same students have an opportunity to take Algebra II as freshman. The sequence that follows allows more students to participate in the 12th grade advanced placement calculus class.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION- Social activities in the physical education classes have been received quite well by the students. Although not offered every year, outside experts have been employed to teach ballroom dancing and roller skating to all high school students. The students are assessed a fee for the roller skate rental and the district assumes the added cost for the ballroom dancing instructor (about $300 for two weeks of instruction).

SOCIAL STUDIES- Special projects in the middle school and high school social studies program make this area a very popular subject for most students.

In the sixth grade social studies is combined with English when a research project based on a specific country is assigned. Costumes, recipes, model homes/buildings and other related items are shared when the project concludes on "International Day." (This same approach is used in some of the primary grades as well.)

In the middle school students participate in an exercise to introduce studying the Bill of Rights in which they are presented information to pass judgement on an individual...only to find at the end they have either sentenced or freed Jesus Christ. They do a similar exercise at the end of the study with Adolph Hitler.

At the high school level students are involved heavily in special projects such as "Sugar Babies" in the unit of sociology, and "The Established Order of Things" as they deal with discrimination. The TV/VCR play an important role in current events, and students make excellent use of the computer for geography and related skills.

MUSIC programs at the elementary level utilize flash cards to introduce and reinforce musical symbols, and primary students play "Name That Tune" to help them recognize songs they have been singing.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS have a variety of "special" ideas. Belly Spelling, Belly Phonics and Belly Math are ideas used in one first grade. Reading incentive programs are used throughout grades 1-4. The "Book-It" program offered by Pizza Hut, the "Try" Program offered by Happy Joes, and local reading contests sponsored by our own education association are responsible for a serious interest in reading. Many teachers award classroom certificates, and the corporations provide coupons for free pizzas. The association presents T-shirts for reading accomplishments as well.

One elementary teacher sponsors afterschool and weekend field trips to local areas. Students that demonstrate responsible behavior earn the right to participate in these "extra" trips.

ENGLISH classes are electives in the Jr/Sr years with courses for college bound students offered at each level. Writing, reading, grammar and literature are strongly emphasized in all classes, at various degrees of difficulty.

SPECIAL CLASSES such as Chapter I Reading and special education are given equal consideration when equipment is purchased or supplies are needed. The high school special education resource room is called "The Secondary Skills Suite" and consists of a two room complex with a kitchen, sewing center, computer area and work tables in one room, and the traditional classroom setting in the other connected room.

AG/SHOP is a diverse subject area that includes drafting, agriculture, woodworking, and basic shop classes. An annual project for the middle school and high school is the construction and sale of a small building (shed) usually built to the owners specifications. The ag class operates a small 5 acre plot of land in cooperation with the crop production units of study.

POTPOURRI

BOOTS AND GLOVES are items that some low income students don't have. We maintain a BOOT/GLOVE fund that provides these items very discreetly. Administrators, secretaries, teachers and community members keep the coffers filled with "silent" contributions. The building principal makes these items available individually, and in the most appropriate manner.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM- This is a great place to study on a hot day or for a change of pace. A few years ago, with summer JTPA students, we constructed two outside classrooms. One is in a wooded section of our school grounds and is merely railroad ties laid into the ground in a semi-circle/amphitheater arrangement...good for pre and post mosquito weather. The other consists of wolmanized benches (cemented into the ground) in a shaded section of the school property. This arrangement is also semi-circular. Both are excellent places for study. We also had all the trees identified and a small path made through our wooded property for science class use. Since the Student Council provided the wood, and JTPA the labor...the cost was zero to the school district.

NOON HOUR ACTIVITIES are an integral part of the middle and high school programs. Both volunteers and a paid supervisor (in the high school) are responsible for the programs. Organized volleyball games, basketball games, tournaments, tug-of-wars, trampoline instruction, "super athlete contests", board games, MTV rooms, and other activities are planned each noon hour to provide activities for middle school students when they can't go outside, and for high school students every day (they are restricted to the building due to our closed campus policy). The programs have turned out to be a big success.

By utilizing a certified teacher to organize and implement the program at the high school level we lose his services for one study hall...and that is the "cost" of this program.

COMPUTERS & COMPUTERS- The big interest, these days, is in computers. No school has the funds to purchase as many computers as they need, or to keep them as updated as they should be. We have both created and are solving our own problem.

We established, a few years ago, the goal of a computer in every classroom by 1990. At the present time we have computers in most of the high school classes, and, in addition, operate a computer lab in the high school and one in the middle school. We also have a few mobile units that the grade school teachers share. We still hope to reach our goal, but with restricted funding, we require outside

financial help. To acquire the necessary funding we did the following three things; first, we established a local fund for contributions, second, we looked for individual "large amount" contributors, and third we talked with local business firms.

To date we have collected over $25,000 from the three efforts with another $5,000 pending for this year. Combined with Chapter II funds and other smaller grants, we have been able to provide excellent computer opportunities for our students...and we continue to work toward our 1990 goal.

NAEIR is an acronym for the National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources. It is an organization that costs $495/year to join, and about $150 in shipping/handling fees per year. It is exactly what the name implies. It is a service organization that allows members to receive "industrial resources" for no cost other than the annual membership and a small handling charge. Four times a year members receive an order book and request as many (they prefer you order at least 100) items as you want. Your order is prorated based on the total number of requests from all members and the amount of items available. Members are guaranteed to double their membership fees in requested merchandise each year.

NAEIR has been a budget saver for our district each year we have joined. I feel it is cost efficient only if I can <u>reduce</u> my budgeted expenditures by the cost of membership and fees. Our last two orders alone more than replaced our yearly costs, and in addition, we received many items we would not have ordered, but are very useful for our instructional program.

According to my figures we are several thousand dollars ahead of the game in terms of actual budget reductions by belonging to NAEIR. (Interested? Write NAEIR, 560 McClure St., P.O. Box 8076, Galesburg, IL 61402).

FIELD TRIPS are something schools begin to drop when funds are limited. Not so here. We, if anything, have more field trips than ever. How so? We charge a nominal fee for bus transportation to cover actual expenditures (driver, gas, tolls), and make the student responsible for admissions. The cost to the district is limited to bus overhead and an occasional substitute. In return we find our teachers planning exciting outings and meaningful educational experiences for our students. Rarely do we have a student that cannot pay, but when we do, we reach into our HAT/GLOVE fund and find an extra two or three dollars.

ENERGY CONSERVATION is a must for districts that want to save money. If bonding is possible then a district should sell bonds and do as much energy conservation work as possible. We have experienced vast operational savings, a more comfortable environment, and an overall safer school district by meeting these needs head on. The grant process is scary, but workable. Energy conservation is easy to sell to the public and is about the most cost efficient move a district can make.

[*][*][*][*][*][*][*][*]

-Finally-

"FORGET ABOUT SIDES" is an attitude, not a program. I would be amiss if I didn't comment on this. Boards of education, teachers, administrators, taxpayers, parents and students are ON THE SAME SIDE. The goal is to provide an education and to make a worthy citizen out of every student. That goal should be shared by everyone. Once this concept is realized we begin to work toward the realization of this goal...together. Negotiations are needed, but should be done from the same side of the fence. Some decisions are best left to teachers, and some best left to administrators...and that needs to be understood. Parents and students must realize they have responsibilities in reaching the common goal as well. Taxpayers must also remember that they too went to school when others were paying the freight...and that they have an essential role to play in the continuation of this cycle.

I'm not foolish enough to believe that we don't have some rough spots in our system. There will always be those that think teachers are overpaid, that administrators have nothing to do, and that the board of education is only there to raise property taxes. And, there will always be parents who think the system is unfair, too demanding or not demanding enough, and that it is not meeting the needs of their child. And, I guess, that is the basis of the eternal challenge...to meet these attitudes head on and to try to get the "team" working together. It can be done. It must be done. And, it must be center focus of a school district if it is to be successful. Cost? Hard work and commitment. It is this same hard work, same dedication, same positive attitude from my staff, my administrators, my board of education, my parents and students, and my communities that have allowed me the opportunity to share this information with you. For without them, there would be nothing to write. I hope this information has been of some help to you and your district.